The first anesthesiologist in Utah is given an award for distinguished service

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Dr. Scott M. Smith, Utah's first anesthesiologist, was honored Sunday by his peers as a leader in research, education and practice of the specialty.

Smith received the Distinguished Service Award of the Utah Society of Anesthesiologists in recognition of significant contributions to the science of anesthesiology.

Smith became an anesthesiologist in the 1940s after severe radiation burns on his left hand, caused by a defective fluoroscope, ended his determination to be a surgeon. He was en route to California in 1943 and decided to stop in Salt Lake City to investigate practice opportunities here. He met Dr. William Ray Rumel, the state's first thoracic surgeon, who was looking for an anesthesiologist. The University of Utah School of Medicine also was seeking a faculty member in the specialty, and the combination of opportunities persuaded Smith to stay in Utah.



Scott M. Smith

Anesthesiology was a relatively new specialty at the time, and many doctors did not recognize the benefits of someone trained to administer anesthesia and monitor patients. Because most of the surgeons administered their own anesthesia (open drop ether, primarily), he was also seen as a threat to their $10 anesthesia fee.

By persevering, he was able to convince colleagues of his value. He also was instrumental in persuading the State Industrial Commission to make an allowance for anesthesia as a separate medical charge. Other insurers soon followed suit and began granting a second $5 fee for the second hour of anesthesia besides the $10 first-hour charge.

In 1946, Smith initiated a residency in anesthesiology at the University of Utah. He remained chairman of the anesthesia department at the U. until 1953, when the medical school converted to a full time faculty. In 1956, he was president of the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

Smith conducted extensive research and used himself as a guinea pig for some of his experiments. He was interested in curare, the potent agent used by some natives to tip their poison darts. He allowed himself to be totally paralyzed temporarily to determine how curare acted in the human body. He proved the compound had no analgesic or central nervous system depressant effects.

His classic research was conducted in 1946 and reported in 1947 in the official publication of the country's anesthesiologists.

He retired in 1980 and still lives in Salt Lake City.

Rescuers transport Cameron Carpenter, who was able to remai